

## 5.0 CEQA MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Use of the Term “Significant”

The following information is provided to clarify the difference between National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements for the determination of significance. While CEQA requires that a determination of significant impacts be stated in the EIR/EIS, NEPA does not. Under NEPA, significance is used to determine whether an EIS, or some lower level of documentation, will be required. Some impacts determined to be significant under CEQA may not be of sufficient magnitude to be determined significant under NEPA. Under NEPA, once a decision to do an EIS is made, it is the magnitude of the impact that is evaluated and no judgement of its significance is deemed important for the text. NEPA does not require that a determination of significant impacts be stated in the EIS/EIR; however, such a determination is required by CEQA. This section discusses the significance of impacts according to CEQA for the Route 905 project. All build alignment alternatives have the same determinations. Please see the appropriate sections of Chapter 4 for more detailed discussions of impacts and proposed mitigation measures.

For the purposes of the impact discussion in this section of the EIS/R, determinations of significant impacts will be made in the CEQA context. The CEQA Guidelines define “significant effect” as “... a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic and aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment. A social or economic change related to a physical change may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant” (CEQA Guidelines, 15382).

“An ironclad definition of significant effect is not possible because the significance of an activity may vary with the setting. For example, an activity which may not be significant in an urban area may be significant in a rural area” (CEQA Guidelines 15064).

### **Significance Determination**

The following list provides a determination for each environmental issue. The ensuing text provides further discussion to explain the determinations. Chapter 4 identified the impacts of the project alignment alternatives and specified mitigation measures intended to reduce or eliminate adverse project effects. For all issues except two (in bold), mitigation would be effective in reducing impacts to a level of insignificance.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Direct Impacts</b>	<b>Cumulative Impacts</b>
Geology	Not Significant	Not Significant
Hazardous Materials	Potentially Significant/ Mitigable	Not Significant
Paleontology	Potentially Significant/ Mitigable	Not Significant
Relocation/ Social/ Economic	Not Significant/ Mitigable	Not Significant
Cultural Resources	Not Significant	Not Significant
Water Quality	Not Significant/ Mitigable	Not Significant
Hydrology/ Floodplain	Not Significant	Not Significant
Land Use/Consistency with Local Plans	Not Significant	Not Significant
Open Space	Not Significant	Not Significant
Agriculture	Not Significant	Not Significant
Traffic Impacts	Not Significant	Not Significant
Noise	Potentially Significant/ Mitigable	Not Significant
Air Quality	Not Significant	Not Significant
Visual Impacts	Potentially Significant Mitigated below Significance	Not Significant
Biology—only vernal pools/ end. plant species	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Significant/Unmitigable</b>
Biology-CSS, shrimp, gnatcatcher, etc	Potentially Significant/ Mitigable	Not Significant
Biology-grassland	Not Significant	Not Significant
Growth Impacts	Not Significant	<b>Significant/Unmitigable (Secondary Impacts)</b>

## **Significant Adverse Impacts Under CEQA**

The unavoidable significant impacts are certain biological resources, and growth impacts.

### **Biological Resources Impacts**

The following federally listed endangered or threatened species associated with vernal pools and coastal sage scrub habitat would be directly, indirectly, or cumulatively impacted by the proposed project: California gnatcatcher, San Diego fairy shrimp, San Diego button-celery, Otay Mesa mint, spreading navarretia, and Otay tarplant. San Diego button-celery, Otay Mesa mint and Otay tarplant also are State listed as endangered.

In general, there has been mixed success in restoring wetlands and waters of the United States. The success of wetlands restoration depends on a variety of factors, including site suitability, hydrology, and quality of maintenance and monitoring. Direct impacts to wetlands and Waters of the U.S., including vernal pools, will be mitigated to a level below significance. The impacts of the project on vernal pools and their associated species are considered cumulatively significant even if the mitigation measures are successful. The impacts would be greater if the mitigation measures were not successful.

There is less experience restoring coastal sage scrub than wetlands. Nevertheless, coastal sage scrub will be mitigated to a level below significance, given the regional efforts involved with the MSCP. Grassland impacts would not be significant, although there would be a minor policy conflict with the MSCP, which requires mitigation for grassland impacts. The project does not propose any mitigation for these impacts; hydroseeding of graded slopes with native species, adjacent to areas of native habitat, is standard practice, and grass seeds will be included for those areas.

For additional information, please refer to [Section 4.10](#) of this document.

### **Growth Impacts**

The direct growth impacts from any of the build alignment alternatives are minor, and do not result in significant negative impacts to the environment. There is no phasing plan for development, which is linked to construction of Route 905, or phased constraint to control the growth. No measures are proposed for this project to mitigate growth impacts.

Nevertheless, Route 905 would provide access to the regional transportation system for an area which is presently inadequately serviced; the infrastructure to support economic activity must be in place for planned growth to be realized. The development potential of this subregion is substantial. The market attractiveness of Otay Mesa and East Otay Mesa would be limited without the provision of adequate and safe access. Therefore, the construction of Route 905 and related transportation projects would contribute to secondary, or indirect, impacts on growth in Otay Mesa and East Otay Mesa. Cumulatively, the adverse environmental impacts from continued development/ growth are significant. For additional information, please refer to [Section 4.8](#) of this document.

**Impacts Mitigated to Less than Significant Under CEQA****Land Use/Consistency with Local Plans**

There would be a minor policy conflict with the MSCP wildlife crossing size. This would not be a significant impact since crossing size would be biologically adequate.

**Social and Community Impacts**

Relocations caused by the project would not be significant, because adequate replacement housing/business sites are available. With implementation of mitigation measures no significant impacts to public health and safety would occur as a result of the project.

**Economic Impacts**

The project would not have an overall significant impact on businesses and the economy, or public finances; it would have a beneficial impact on business growth.

**Noise Impacts**

There are four residences represented by the two noise receptor sites selected for the proposed project. With the proposed noise mitigation (half-box walls/ property enclosure), the noise impacts are mitigable. Where barriers are feasible and reasonable, and property owners concur, Caltrans would construct the proposed noise barriers.

**Visual Impacts**

Existing visual quality is low. Impacts would be “moderately high”, and mitigation measures reduce the impact to “low”, a level below significance.

**Other Impacts**

With the implementation of mitigation measures, impacts to the following environmental resources were found not significant: geology, hazardous materials, paleontology, cultural resources, water quality, hydrology, floodplains, open space, agriculture/ farmland, traffic, and construction- related impacts not addressed above.

**Impacts found Not Significant Under CEQA**

The project has no impacts or no significant impact to energy, air quality and the coastal zone.